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ABSTRACT

An assessment of welfare-related experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients in New York City (New York), Newark (New Jersey), and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) was conducted. Data were developed through 8 self-contained focus groups involving 63 participants. An additional focus group was conducted with human service professionals who serve Puerto Rican clients on AFDC. The following findings are highlighted: (1) a majority of participants are single heads of households with children, 25 years or older, Spanish-dominant, without a high school diploma, and below the poverty level; (2) a majority (73 percent) had been on welfare for over 3 years; (3) participants enrolled for AFDC due to family-related rather than work-related values; (4) AFDC enrollment triggers conflict with other human service agencies and the criminal justice system; (5) family responsibilities, lack of English proficiency and basic skills, the cost and logistics of transportation, and housing costs were the most significant barriers to self-sufficiency; (6) most wish to work or study but exhibit behavioral deficits that impair the transition to self-sufficiency; and (7) Puerto Rican human service professionals have also experienced disdain and stereotyping. Included are 2 tables, recommendations, a 38-item bibliography, and profiles of the Family Support Act of 1988 and community service agencies. (JB)

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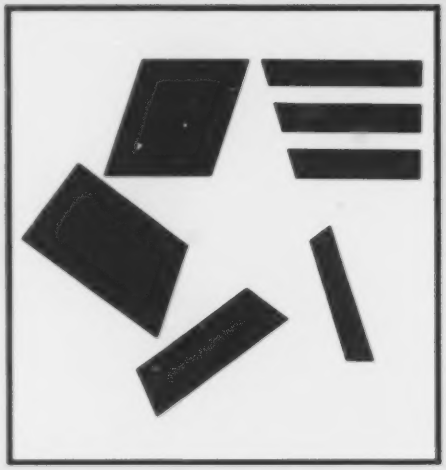

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National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.

The National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., (NPRC) was founded in 1977 to further the social, economic, and political well-being of Puerto Ricans throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Based in Washington, D.C., NPRC is a nonprofit, tax-exempt association providing a presence and voice for all Puerto Ricans at the national level.

As a membership association, NPRC has access to grass-roots views of Puerto Rican needs, problems, and aspirations. NPRC conveys these views to decision makers through its contacts with the media, leading institutions, Congress and the Executive Branch, and individuals in the public and private sectors.

To further its mission, NPRC has developed programs in three broad areas. Programs in advocacy, research, and policy analysis are carried out primarily in Washington, D.C. Programs to enhance the image of Puerto Ricans in the United States, such as the NPRC Life Achievement Awards, are carried out nationally. Partnership projects in community economic development are carried out locally.

The goal of all programs is to influence national policies as they impact on the Puerto Rican community.

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Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients

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Foreword

In February of 1991, NPRC adopted a ten-year public policy agenda entitled *A Blueprint for Change: A Puerto Rican Agenda for the 1990s.* Concerning the issue of poverty, the agenda notes that according to census data, "31 percent of Puerto Rican families fell below the poverty level in 1988 compared to 25 percent for all Hispanics."

NPRC believes that besides education, employment and job training are the keys to reducing poverty and to rebuilding strong Puerto Rican communities on the U.S. mainland and in Puerto Rico. But as this report suggests, the service needs of Puerto Ricans differ from those of other groups.

Implementing the Family Support Act: Perspectives of Puerto Rican Clients represents a significant initial step in NPRC's efforts to bring to public attention the special needs and concerns of Puerto Ricans who are on welfare. A second report will assess the current effectiveness of job training programs in moving Puerto Ricans toward self-sufficiency.

From the findings it is clear that more information about the often unique characteristics of Puerto Rican female-headed households is essential to the formulation of public policies that work. Some of the conclusions, such as the need for counseling and English instruction, while obvious to practitioners and experts, are nonetheless significant in light of the continuing need for such services. A substantial reduction in poverty will not occur unless all sectors—private, public, and the communities involved—understand the nature and dimensions of the problem. Similarly, a program of action requires the attention of long-standing and obvious needs.

NPRC, its individual and organizational members, and Puerto Rican communities face a major challenge in the 1990s. Together we must advocate for policies which promote job training programs that will reduce the welfare rates, as well as promote realistic and humane policies for families who will still remain on welfare. NPRC will continue to call on the increasing number of Puerto Ricans who have overcome poverty and entered the economic mainstream to join with us to achieve the goals set in our public policy agenda to reduce poverty in the Puerto Rican community to the level of the general population in a decade.

Louis Núñez
President

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NPRC's appreciation also goes to key individuals in city and state agencies who provided materials and information on JOBS plans and statistical information on Puerto Rican AFDC recipients in the study's selected cities. They are Arthur Blank, formerly of the Human Resources Administration of the City of New York; Lillian Escobar-Haskins, Executive Director of the Governor's Commission on Latino Affairs of the State of Pennsylvania; Abby Farber of the Human Resources Administration of the City of New York; Susan Mitchell of the New York State Department of Social Services; Mariano Vega, Jr., of the Division of Social Services of Hudson County, New Jersey; and Kathy Yorkievitz of the Department of Public Welfare of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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Executive Summary

Introduction and Methodology

This report presents the findings of an assessment of welfare-related experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients in New York City; Newark, New Jersey; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On the basis of these findings it offers recommendations aimed at influencing the implementation of the Family Support Act of 1988 in ways that are meaningful to this special population.

To carry out the project, NPRC selected four community-based organizations (CBOs) from among its network of over 100 Puerto Rican organizations nationwide. In New York City, NPRC worked with Loisaida, Inc., and the Puerto Rican Family Institute; in Newark, with the St. Columba Neighborhood Club; and in Philadelphia, with the Centro Pedro Claver.

Self-contained focus groups were conducted to produce the necessary data. Although the research results can stand alone, they should not be interpreted as representing the full spectrum of experiences and opinions on the topics reviewed. Yet the demographics of NPRC's sample are similar to those of a scientific sample. Likewise, the findings seem consistent with the results of other research.

In total, eight focus groups involving 63 Puerto Rican AFDC recipients were conducted: two each in Newark and Philadelphia, and four in New York City. A small group of non-Puerto Rican Latino and two Puerto Rican male AFDC recipients also participated in the focus groups. This allowed NPRC to explore why Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican Latinos go on welfare and to examine their relative attitudes toward welfare and work.

An additional focus group was conducted with human service professionals from the participating CBOs. The purpose of this discussion was to review the welfare-related experiences of professionals who serve Puerto Rican clients on AFDC.

Major Findings

- *A majority of focus group participants are single heads of households with children (90 percent), are 25 years of age or older (79 percent) and Spanish-dominant (68 percent), have not completed high school (75 percent), and are below the poverty level (90 percent).*

- *A majority has been on welfare for over three years (73 percent), a handful has unreported earnings or support from absent fathers, and over one-third are currently receiving non-FSA (Family Support Act) job or educational training.*

- *For focus group participants welfare was a response to difficult circumstances. Their decision to enroll was influenced more by family-related than by work-related values.*

- *AFDC enrollment triggers conflicts involving other human service agencies and the criminal justice system. The experience of welfare is more difficult for Spanish-dominant clients. Recipients are often discouraged from seeking employment and frustrated by punitive rules and practices.*

- *Family responsibilities, lack of English proficiency and basic skills, the cost and logistics of transportation, and housing costs are the most significant barriers to the self-sufficiency of focus group participants.*

- *Most wish to work or study; they dislike welfare and recognize that it fosters a structure of incentives that is not right. They also exhibit behavioral deficits that could impair the transition to self-sufficiency.*

- *The prejudice and mistreatment often associated with the experience of welfare is not limited to AFDC recipients; even Puerto Rican human service professionals have been subject to the disdain and stereotyping experienced by some of their clients.*

Implications

Nativity, age, schooling, and language deficits make Puerto Ricans the least employable of all AFDC groups. The number of focus group participants that are currently in training suggests that a good many of them are willing to do what is necessary to change their lives. Research has shown that English proficiency and specialized training significantly increase the odds of being in the labor force. And high school and college education dramatically decrease the odds of being unemployed. There is enough evidence which confirms that families at the highest levels of risk can be helped if the services are intensive, comprehensive, and provided by competent and caring staff.

Among the educational services Puerto Rican AFDC mothers will need, English language training and basic/remedial education stand foremost. While the proportion of those that could benefit from higher education in the short term is low, FSA reimbursement restrictions regarding college costs are nonetheless unfortunate. In the long run this restriction will have to be removed given the proven role of a college education in increasing the likelihood of employment and the progressively higher educational requirements of the labor market.

The emphasis on family-related as opposed to work-related values in the decision to go on welfare suggests a clear difference between Puerto Rican AFDC recipients and other special populations. This emphasis is positive. The preference of Puerto Rican mothers for caring for their children themselves should be supported rather than undermined.

In no other aspect are the mothers interviewed more at odds with the implementation focus of the Family Support Act than in their emphasis on family rather than on work. In that sense, participation requirements under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program promise to put their families under twice as much stress as the families of other groups.

There is plenty in the experience of these mothers to make them not want to work. Yet there is a substratum of optimism and willingness to change that runs through even the most reluctant. All they need is help and in some cases those who are optimistic and motivated will require more of it rather than less, simply because the odds against them are higher. Most will also require services to help them acquire the discipline and sense of structure that a succesful entrance into the world of work requires.

Human service administrators should not be surprised, however, to find few Puerto Rican AFDC mothers that expect fair treatment from a system that treats even Puerto Rican professionals rather badly. In the same way that prejudiced perceptions of minority groups die hard, it is usually very difficult to overcome the distrust and defensiveness that these perceptions provoke in the stereotyped group.

Recommendations

There is no one single factor that accounts for the large number of Puerto Rican women on welfare and no single strategy will enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty and dependency. Therefore, if the following general guidelines are applied to the implementation process, for these mothers the transition to self-sufficiency will be more likely.

- *The emphasis of collaborative arrangements between JOBS programs and human service agencies must be on the strengths and potential of currently existing service delivery systems. The challenge for human service administrators is to prevent the best features of JOBS programs from being ineffective if implemented through a system that is insensitive and dehumanizing.*

- *The promise of economic progress, if adequately presented, can make even the most reluctant AFDC mother agree to invest time and energy toward self-sufficiency. JOBS programs must have a strong marketing emphasis which, to be appealing to Puerto Ricans, must be bilingual and culturally sensitive.*

- *Puerto Rican AFDC mothers must be subject to intensive, risk-free assessments. Their needs must be fully identified and properly addressed; their trust must be rewarded with help rather than punitive measures.*

- *These assessments must take into account the values underlying specific preferences. Puerto Rican single heads of families who fall within federally targeted groups but who prefer to stay at home to care for their children should not be mandated to participate in JOBS programs. This decision should be voluntary. Nonvolunteers should be offered instead family support that focuses on the needs of their children.*

- *Puerto Rican single heads of families who are willing to accept child care must be offered family- or neighborhood-based services. While the welfare of children must remain the paramount concern of child-care arrangements, the psychological well-being of their mothers must also be taken into account.*

- *Counseling and psychological support will be essential for most participants in JOBS programs. This kind of service is important for AFDC mothers born in Puerto Rico and will also be extremely helpful to those whose efforts toward self-sufficiency are threatened by rather unfavorable odds.*

- *Educational services and employment training must focus on English instruction and basic skills. These efforts must be tied in with job growth strategies, particularly through community economic development.*

- *The participation of Puerto Rican or Latino community-based organizations in the implementation process will increase the likelihood of self-suffiency. CBOs have a useful role to play in marketing, assessment, service provision, and community economic development.*

I. Introduction

The Family Support Act (FSA) was signed into law as P.L. 100-485 on October 13, 1988. Its stated purpose is to revise the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to emphasize work, child support, and family benefits by encouraging and assisting families to obtain the education, training, and employment needed to avoid long-term welfare dependence. (See Appendix 1.)

In July of 1989 the Ford Foundation awarded NPRC a two-year project grant to conduct focus groups with Puerto Rican AFDC recipients in cities with large Puerto Rican populations.[1] The purpose of the project is two-fold: first, to review the welfare-related experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients and assess how these relate to FSA implementation; and second, to produce an early assessment of Puerto Rican participation in JOBS programs. Its findings will form the basis of recommendations aimed at shaping the broad principles of the Family Support Act into programs which are meaningful to Puerto Rican AFDC recipients.

This report describes the methodology and findings of the sessions conducted in 1990. The report for the 1991 focus groups will review the experiences of Puerto Ricans participating in JOBS programs in selected cities.

Section III presents a profile of focus group participants based on selected characteristics. Subsequent sections present and discuss findings related to the following themes: (1) the decision to go on welfare, (2) the experience of welfare, (3) barriers to self-sufficiency, and (4) attitudes toward welfare and work. A description and brief analysis of the discussion held in the CBO Group comes next and the last section presents NPRC's conclusions and recommendations.

II. Methodology

Self-contained focus groups were conducted in three localities: New York City; Newark, New Jersey; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These cities have the largest concentrations of Puerto Ricans on the East Coast and have significant Puerto Rican AFDC populations as well.

Focus groups constitute one specific technique to collect qualitative data.[2] The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible otherwise.

The key distinguishing feature of self-contained focus groups is that the research results can stand alone. This does not prevent the data from being used as part of a larger project; rather, it asserts that no such further data collection is necessary before reporting the results from the focus group research itself. The main limitation of this method is sample bias. But such bias is only a problem if it is ignored; in other words, if the focus group discussions are interpreted as representing the full spectrum of experiences and opinions. Therefore, it is important to specify that these discussions represent the perspectives of a small group of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients. Yet the demographics of NPRC's sample are similar to those of a

[1] Two parallel studies were also funded by the Ford Foundation: the National Council of La Raza's *On My Own: Mexican American Women, Self-Sufficiency, and the Family Support Act*, written by Julie Quiroz and Regina Tosca (December 1990); and the National Urban League's *Report of the National Urban League Family Support Act Focus Groups Sessions*, written by Ann Hill (forthcoming).

[2] See David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups As Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1988).

scientific sample.[3] Likewise, the findings seem consistent with the results of other research.

To carry out the project, NPRC selected four community-based organizations (CBOs) from among its network of over 100 Puerto Rican organizations nationwide. In New York City, NPRC worked with Loisaida, Inc., and the Puerto Rican Family Institute; in Newark, with the St. Columba Neighborhood Club; and in Philadelphia, with the Centro Pedro Claver. (See Appendix 2.) The criteria for agency selection were (1) current involvement in welfare-related services, (2) sufficient access to Puerto Rican AFDC recipients among its caseload, and (3) presence of staff qualified to act as focus group facilitators. Qualified staff were defined as bilingual, social work practitioners well-versed in group dynamics.

Each agency was responsible for the selection of focus group participants according to guidelines set by NPRC. Given that participants were selected from the agencies' caseloads, these guidelines focused on the selection procedure rather than on the characteristics of the potential participants. Substantive criteria for selection included only sex (female) and ethnicity (Puerto Rican origin). Concerning procedure, the emphasis was on the methods most likely to guarantee attendance, the minimum and maximum number of participants per session, and the kind of participants most likely to make positive contributions to the discussions.

Agency facilitators reviewed their caseloads to identify potential candidates. Preliminary selections were then made and interviews were conducted to invite the candidates to participate. In these interviews the candidates were told that the focus group would generate information to be used in the implementation of the Family Support Act. They were advised that NPRC and the participating CBO were interested in reviewing the provisions of the law in light of their experience with the existing service delivery system. To allow for comparisons with other populations and data sets, a profile questionnaire was completed for each participant.

Shortly before each session, written notices of the meetings were either sent or hand-delivered to the selected candidates as a reminder. Project information as well as written materials were provided in both English and Spanish.

To defray transportation and food costs, some participants were offered a stipend. Others were provided food and refreshments by the CBOs and a transportation allowance. On-site child care was provided by the CBOs for the duration of the focus group sessions.

In total, eight focus groups involving 63 Puerto Rican AFDC recipients were conducted: two each in Newark and Philadelphia, and four in New York City. All sessions were conducted in Spanish. English translation was provided to English-dominant participants whenever necessary.

An additional focus group was conducted with human service professionals from the participating CBOs (hereafter referred to as CBO Group). The CBO Group session was conducted in English. The purpose of this discussion was to review the welfare-related experiences of professionals who serve Puerto Rican clients on AFDC.

A misunderstanding of the guidelines outlined by NPRC prompted one of the CBOs

[3] NPRC's data is compared to data from the New York State Department of Social Services (DSS) random survey of 815 white, black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican female AFDC case heads, conducted in October 1987.

in New York City to include a handful of non-Puerto Rican Latino and two Puerto Rican male AFDC recipients in the focus groups. Nonetheless, this was a welcome outcome which allowed NPRC to explore, albeit cursorily, why Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican Latinos go on welfare and to examine their relative attitudes toward welfare and work. Profile data for non-Puerto Rican participants is not included in the quantitative tabulations; their contribution to the discussion was used only in regard to the qualitative aspects of the research.

Agency facilitators moderated the focus group sessions using a discussion guide prepared by NPRC. José Cruz moderated the CBO Group session. He was also present in two of the focus group sessions, in New York City and Newark, to observe the group dynamics and the focus group process as a source of insight concerning attitudes toward welfare and work.

III. Focus Group Participant Characteristics

Birthplace:

- Seventy-three percent of the focus group participants were born in Puerto Rico.

Age:

- Seventy-nine percent are 25 years of age or older.

Primary Language:

- For 68 percent Spanish is the primary language.

Schooling:

- Only 25 percent have a high school diploma.
- The proportion of those with eight years of schooling or less was 22 percent.

Marital Status:

- Forty-three percent have never been married.
- Ten percent are married.
- Twenty-seven percent are separated.
- Nineteen percent are divorced.

Number of Children:

- Fifty-six percent have fewer than three children.
- Forty-four percent have three children or more.

Income:

- Six focus group participants declined to report their incomes.
- The remaining 57 (90 percent) are below the poverty level. Their average income, based on the amounts reported, is $5,500 per year.[4]
- A handful have supplemental earnings from part-time occupations and support income from absent fathers which they keep concealed from the welfare system.

Duration of AFDC Enrollment:

- Seventy-three percent have been on welfare for over three years.

Training:

- Thirty-five percent are currently receiving educational or job training.[5]

[4] This average is based on totals which draw on various sources for each participant. In addition to AFDC grants, individuals reported food stamps, rent subsidies, child-care allowances, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits as sources of income.

[5] Only one focus group participant is currently attending school and one participates in a job training program. Eleven percent attend the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and 22 percent are enrolled in a General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency program.

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Characteristic	Number of Participants	Percent of Total
Age		
Under 25	12	19
Over 25	50	79
Sex		
Females	63	100
Nativity		
United States	16	25
Puerto Rico	46	73
Primary Language		
English	20	32
Spanish	43	68
Family Profile		
Single Head of Household	56	89
Less Than Three Children	35	56
Three Children or More	28	44
Education		
High School	16	25
Dropout	43	68
Eighth Grade or Less	14	22
Income		
Below Poverty	57	90
Duration of AFDC Enrollment		
Less Than Three Years	14	22
Three Years or More	46	73
Training		
Job	1	2
Language (ESOL)	7	11
GED	14	22
In School	1	2

Discussion

A correlation of the data collected by NPRC with unpublished data collected by the New York State Department of Social Services (DSS) shows that the characteristics of focus group participants are similar to those of the New York City Puerto Rican AFDC population. Of the 63 AFDC mothers who participated in the focus groups, 18 (29 percent) are from New York City. But this proportion does not distort the comparison since, except for the number of those in training, no major differences among the three cities were found. Further, since New York City has the largest Puerto Rican population in Northeastern cities where Puerto Ricans concentrate, it is fitting to use it as a standard for comparison. Table 2 below illustrates some of the similarities found.

TABLE 2
Selected Characteristics of Focus Group Participants and Puerto Rican AFDC Case Heads in New York City

Characteristic	Focus Groups	DSS
Born in Puerto Rico	73%	73%
25 or older	79%	81%
Spanish Dominant	68%	81%
Schooling (Eighth Grade or Less)	22%	28%
High School	25%	24%

While considerably fewer women were Spanish dominant in the focus groups than in the DSS sample, the proportion is still high and thus significant.

DSS data for black AFDC mothers show that they are younger, have more years of schooling, and are more proficient in English than their Puerto Rican counterparts. Island-born Puerto Rican AFDC mothers have additional disadvantages: they are less likely to have training or work experience than mainland-born Puerto Rican women and more likely to suffer from serious illnesses.[6] Furthermore, research on the selectivity of the migration process shows that women with traits associated with poverty are most likely to move from Puerto Rico to the mainland.[7]

NPRC's data for focus group mothers correlates with these research findings. These mothers are clearly not professional or even service-sector work candidates. Economic restructuring in Northeastern cities has made blue-collar employment less likely for people with little or no skills and lack of English proficiency. The manufacturing jobs that in the past held the promise of reasonable incomes and possible upward mobility are all but gone in these cities and have been replaced by jobs with higher educational requirements.[8] In today's labor market, education and English proficiency are indispensable for most jobs, a fact which is recognized by a majority of focus group participants.[9]

On the issue of income and resources, Clara Rodríguez has written in *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.*:

[6] Luis A. Duany, "Puerto Rican Welfare Recipients in New York City: Effective Service Delivery to Those Most in Need," unpublished paper, no date, p. 36 (forthcoming in the *Journal of Hispanic Policy*, Vol. 5, Spring 1991).
[7] Douglas T. Gurak and Luis M. Falcón, "The Puerto Rican Family and Poverty: Complex Paths to Poor Outcomes," in *Puerto Ricans: Breaking Out of the Cycle of Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., 1990), pp. 43-44.
[8] William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 39-41.
[9] Eighty-one percent of focus group participants agreed that learning English is indispensable to moving ahead in today's society. Only 17 percent considered learning English important but not indispensable.

> The intriguing and unanswered question, of course, is not how Puerto Rican families receive what they receive, but how they survive on what they receive.[10]

The possibilities, Rodríguez suggests, are the existence of a strong underground economy and the ability of Puerto Rican women to make scarce resources go a long way.

Unreported earnings and income highlight the inadequacies of current AFDC grant levels. In New York City the basic AFDC grant for a family of four is $618 per month (less than $8,000 annually); Newark and Philadelphia grant $488 and $497 respectively to a family of four (less than $6,000 annually). According to the mothers involved, neither AFDC support nor supplemental earnings and income are sufficient to support their families; that is why they need both. These mothers keep earnings from part-time jobs and/or payments from absent fathers "under the table" in order not to jeopardize AFDC support.

Implications

The characteristics noted above suggest that Puerto Rican AFDC mothers will be among the most difficult to serve. The number of focus group participants that are currently in training suggests that a good many of them are willing to do what is necessary to change their lives.

Nativity, age, schooling, and language deficits make this group the least employable of all AFDC groups. On the other hand, research has shown that "English ability and specialized training significantly increase the odds of being in the labor force. [And] [h]igh school and college education dramatically decrease the odds of being unemployed."[11]

Therefore, to assist Puerto Rican mothers achieve self-sufficiency JOBS programs should incorporate a variety of components.

These include English-language training, basic/remedial education, occupational training, and vocational education. Although not directly part of JOBS programs, family and/or neighborhood-based child-care arrangements will influence both the extent and the quality of participation of Puerto Rican AFDC mothers (more on this in the following section).

The proportion of Puerto Rican AFDC recipients that could benefit from higher education in the short term is likely to be low.

Despite high educational deficits, at least 25 percent of those interviewed are potential candidates for college. The law states that attendance in good standing at an institution of higher education may constitute satisfactory participation in the JOBS program. But the costs of such activity do not qualify for reimbursement from the federal government. In the long run, this restriction will have to be removed given the proven role of a college education in increasing the likelihood of employment and the progressively higher educational requirements of the labor market.

[10] Clara E. Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boston: Unwyn Hyman, 1989), p. 40.

[11] Gurak and Falcón, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

IV. The Decision to Go on Welfare

Findings

For focus group participants welfare was a response to difficult circumstances.

While research has found that this is the case for most individuals receiving public assistance,[12] many people nevertheless believe that Puerto Ricans go on welfare for reasons that are not related to need. The evidence from the focus groups confirms other research findings and belies the conventional wisdom.

I am on welfare because my husband is sick and cannot work. I need it to support my kids.
Ruth, Philadelphia.[13]

I am on welfare because when I came here [to the United States] I came with my husband and he left me, and I was left alone with my daughter.
Sara, New York City

I suffer from asthma and cannot work. I'm on welfare out of need.
Zulma, Newark

Their decision to resort to public assistance was influenced more by family-related than by work-related values.

According to DSS data, 46 percent of Puerto Rican AFDC case heads cited raising a family as the main reason for not working compared to 37 percent of black AFDC case heads. Research also has found that Puerto Rican AFDC mothers are less willing than black mothers to leave their children in the care of others;[14] they prefer taking care of their children themselves. For them the best alternative form of child care is that which is provided by relatives. The evidence from the focus groups also supports these findings.

I have small children and I'm not going to leave them with just anyone.
Margie, Newark

I don't work because I have small children.
Noelia, Newark

If I had a mother or a sister I wouldn't be on welfare. I would leave my kid with them and look for work. But I don't and they [the welfare agency] have to understand that. I'm not going to leave my kid with any stranger.
Matilde, New York City

Contextual and background factors hampered the ability of some focus group participants to weigh alternatives to welfare.

This is suggested by Marta's testimony and experience. Her mother had also been on welfare and Marta grew up as a welfare child. Her reason for going on welfare suggested an "intergenerational transmission of poverty" syndrome. As she put it:

[12] See, for example, David T. Ellwood, *Poor Support, Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 11; also, Marta Tienda and Leif Jensen, "Poverty and Minorities: A Quarter-Century Profile of Color and Socioeconomic Disadvantage," paper presented at the Institute for Research on Poverty conference, November 5-7, 1986, revised version, 1987, pp. 19, 25.
[13] No real names are used in this report. The statements of Spanish-dominant focus group participants were translated into English by José E. Cruz.

[14] Close to 10 percent of Puerto Rican mothers in the DSS sample cited disliking child care as a reason for not working whereas only 2 percent of black mothers did so.

I started [on welfare] with my mother and I stood there [sic] since I had a baby. After you hit an age you get your own stuff so...they took everything and they put it on my name and ever since I've been on welfare. My own mother was on welfare so I couldn't imagine anything else.

The actual range of choices available to these Puerto Ricans is limited.

Marta's statement above also illustrates this finding. But it was Sonia who most explicitly stated what all focus group participants expressed.

You end up on welfare because you have no choice. It is like being on drugs and trying to quit and not being able to....When you are on welfare you are afraid of everything. Welfare is a curse for poor people who come to the United States.

Sonia, New York City

Non-Puerto Rican Latino focus group participants with no experience of public assistance in their countries of origin applied for welfare for the same reasons as did Puerto Rican Islanders with experience of public assistance.

Historically, the stereotype about Puerto Ricans has been that they move to the United States to go on welfare. But with one exception all Puerto Rican focus group participants reported moving to the United States to study and/or work. In this both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican participants were similar.

We never thought of going on welfare but the time came when we had to, so we did it.

Angela, Colombian AFDC mother
New York City

I had my own business in Puerto Rico and I had never been on welfare. But in 1984 my son was diagnosed with osteomyelitis and was bedridden for two years. I lost my business and moved [to the United States] with my three other kids so he could receive treatment. I was referred to the welfare agency by a relative.

Sandra, Dominican AFDC mother
New York City

My husband left me and we divorced. I was left alone with my daughter and I could not work so I had no choice but to go on welfare.

Norma, Ecuadorean AFDC mother
New York City

Discussion

Some focus group participants believe that the decision to go on welfare represents a failure of the imagination and leads to narrow, impoverished lives. Marta, from New York City, best exemplifies this. Her case is interesting because of her belief that the experience of growing up on welfare narrowed the range of life choices available to her.

Hers is by no means an unreasonable belief. Yet for a single parent with no high school diploma in postindustrial New York, it is also reasonable to assume that short-term alternatives might simply not exist. For Marta, however, the relevant fact was that she could not conceive of any possibilities other than repeating her mother's experience.

In some cases, focus group participants view welfare as a temporary phase in their lives. They dislike welfare but see their decision to enroll as a legitimate response to being unable to financially support children. They are not psychologically dependent, like Marta, but feel trapped nonetheless. They are willing to take advantage of genuine opportunities for progress. They feel, however, that because they are perceived as hopeless by many in and out of the welfare system, welfare dependency becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The extent to which human capital dificiencies, low self-esteem, and macroeconomic factors contribute to increases in the number of Puerto Rican mothers on the welfare rolls is no doubt significant. But family-related values appear also to be a factor affecting welfare enrollment. In other words, it is not just that Puerto Rican AFDC mothers are more likely to enroll because they are less employable than blacks or whites, but also that their enrollment is a decision that reflects an emphasis on family-related values.

The Family Support Act conflates the concepts of work and self-sufficiency and thus assumes that employment is synonymous with sound families. This has reinforced a climate of opinion in which it is automatically presumed that choosing welfare reflects a rejection of family values.

The law assumes that income-maintenance programs promote long-term dependency. But, in fact, participation in such programs becomes a barrier to self-sufficiency in the context of macroeconomic factors such as slow growth of productivity and wages.[15] For some of the focus group participants "economic progress" is tied to adequate AFDC grants as well as to jobs that pay well. While this is an odd concept of economic progress, it falls into line with findings which suggest that government intervention in the form of cash benefits is the most effective remedy against poverty.[16] Research on the impact of cash benefits on the poverty rate of minority groups has found, however, that means-tested cash transfers are generally less effective than non-means-tested cash transfers.[17]

Implications

The emphasis on family-related as opposed to work-related values in the decision to go on welfare suggests a clear difference between Puerto Rican AFDC recipients and other special populations. This emphasis is positive. The preference of Puerto Rican mothers for caring for their children themselves should be supported rather than undermined.

In no other aspect are the mothers interviewed more at odds with the implementation focus of the Family Support Act than in their emphasis on family rather than on work. In that sense, JOBS participation requirements promise to put their families under twice as much stress as the families of other groups. Just as other single heads of households, Puerto Rican mothers will be subject to the stress created by the demands of self-sufficiency. But unlike some single AFDC recipients, they will also have to tackle the strain created by the need to recast the gender roles associated with their family values. Quiroz and Tosca, for example, found that with one exception, the Mexican American women they interviewed saw marriage as a loss of independence and being single as one step

[15] See Spencer Rich, "Tracing the Persistence of Poverty," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 1989, p. A23.

[16] Spencer Rich, "Census Study Yields Lower Poverty Rate," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1988, p. A1.

[17] Tienda and Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

toward economic independence.[18] In direct opposition to what Quiroz and Tosca report, the opinion, as stated by one participant, that "women don't need men to get on with their lives and forge ahead" was singularly exceptional in NPRC's focus groups. Although a number of participants condemned irresponsible fathers, there were no concomitant rejections of the institution of marriage nor of the traditional role of women in husband-wife families.

To reduce the incidence of psychological dependence and broaden the range of choices available to children of welfare-dependent families, early interventions through family support programs that focus on the needs of children are necessary.

As Lisbeth Schorr has pointed out: "Failure and despair don't have as firm a grip on young children and the seeds of later trouble are usually sown early....[B]oth damaging outcomes and the risk factors that precede them can be substantially reduced by early intervention."[19] Her research shows that help for families is possible and effective if channeled through programs attuned to their special needs.[20]

Not all Puerto Rican AFDC recipients will need motivational counseling or extensive case management.

Comparisons of Puerto Rican, black, and Other Hispanic AFDC recipients often overshadow the fact that Puerto Ricans are themselves a heterogeneous group. All focus group participants are in need of help. But their individual reasons for going on welfare will require specific approaches and diverse levels of services to help them get off. Many will require extensive support and training but others will need only assistance that enables them to overcome temporary hurdles.

V. The Experience of Welfare

Findings

AFDC enrollment triggers conflicts involving other human service agencies and the criminal justice system.

The following stories, reported in the CBO Group, illustrate this finding.

> *Angel and Casilda are Puerto Rican AFDC recipients who live in a welfare hotel. They are wrongly accused of child neglect and their children are removed from the residence. Since the presence of children is a requirement for residency in a welfare hotel, they are evicted. Homeless and without their children they must now face the charges of child neglect in Family Court and Criminal Court and must initiate action to fight their eviction.*
>
> New York City

> *Susana is accused by her homemaker[21] of sexually abusing her two daughters who both suffer from Downs Syndrome. The allegation is based on a misinterpretation of behavior that is typical of children in that condition. Two doctors certify that such behavior is normal and also find no physical evidence that sexual abuse has taken place. Susana is nonetheless subpoenaed and her children are taken away.*
>
> New York City

[18] National Council of La Raza, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[19] Lisbeth Schorr, "Let's Stop Recycling Poverty," *The Washington Post*, August 7, 1988, p. B2.
[20] *Idem.*, *Within Our Reach, Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (New York: Doubleday, 1988). See especially Chapter 10, "The Lessons of Successful Programs," pp. 256-283.
[21] The homemaker was provided by the Child Welfare Administration to help Susana improve her parental and household management skills.

Laura tells her social worker that she has rats in her apartment and that her children are sleeping on the floor. The social worker does not help Laura solve these problems. Instead of helping Laura find a bed or calling the health department, she calls the Child Welfare Administration (CWA) and requests that Laura's children be removed from her apartment.

New York City

The experience of welfare is more difficult for Spanish-dominant clients.

The testimony of focus group participants illustrates insensitive service-delivery practices that are relevant to FSA implementation. These practices have meanings that are not lost on Puerto Ricans; they read messages of belittlement and disregard based on their inability to command the English language and these readings can easily translate into skepticism of the promise of the Family Support Act.

They [the welfare agency] should have an interpreter there because they discriminate against you, you are left for last and sometimes they tell you to come back the next day.

Adela, Newark

I've seen people who don't know English with Anglo caseworkers and they [the clients] would have to bring their own interpreter.

Ana, Philadelphia

If you don't speak English they [welfare agency staff] ignore you.

Consuelo, Newark

Even when they [the welfare agency] have bilingual people...they don't want to speak [Spanish], they don't want to help you.

Carmen, Newark

Puerto Rican AFDC recipients who try to find work through welfare departments are often discouraged, and often no effort is made to motivate those who are simply complying with agency requirements.

While this finding does not encompass the full range of service-delivery practices at welfare agencies nor of client's experiences, the examples reported were considered widespread enough to be significant. Two illustrations best represent the sense of the discussion in the focus groups.

Rafael is a Work Incentive Program (WIN) participant who constantly expresses his interest in finding a job to his caseworker. Every time he goes to the welfare center his paperwork is completed quickly and he is sent away. "There is no work, go home," he is routinely told. Zaida, another WIN participant, expresses no such interest and displays no enthusiasm. She is left to sit in the office all day before her release form is signed and she can go home.

CBO Group, New York

A focus group participant had this to say about her experience with mandated employment training:

It's ridiculous, it's a joke. When you get there they all walk around you and they make believe you are not there, then you sit there two or three hours and then they tell you you can go home.

Elisa, Philadelphia

Welfare rules and practices are often punitive and prevent AFDC recipients from effectively making the transition to self-sufficiency.

Some of the statements below are moot in light of certain provisions of the Family Support Act. For example, under the law, medical benefits are not immediately terminated once an individual finds employment and as of October 1, 1990, all states are required to provide AFDC benefits to two-parent families in which one of the parents is unemployed. They are relevant, however, insofar as they belie the notion that the barriers to the self-sufficiency of Puerto Rican individuals are self-imposed or simply the result of human capital deficiencies.

If I find a job I'll lose my medical card. I can't afford that. The type of job I can get wouldn't include a medical card.

Sylvia, Philadelphia

I notified welfare that I had found a job and they cut my benefits in less than a month. I've been out of work for almost a year now and I'm still getting the reduced amount.

Noemí, Newark

When you receive child support you get less from your monthly welfare allowance so you are better off without the child support.

María, Newark

You find a good man and you try to move ahead, and the man says "let's get married" and you say no I can't do that because I'm on welfare, and that's wrong.

Sonia, New York City

Elena gets a job through the welfare center and after a week on the job she is called for a "Face to Face."[22] She is kept waiting for her appointment a full day. For various reasons she is called back to the welfare office during business hours every few weeks. She loses her job.

CBO Group, New York City

Mothers who go on welfare hoping that a genuine opportunity for advancement will arise eventually come to feel that the system frustrates such hopes.

This is the case for AFDC recipients whose frustration with the system stems from the poor treatment received from caseworkers. They do not suffer from low self-esteem but rather struggle not to lose self-respect in the face of the low expectations others have of them. The following statement captures the essence of how the focus group mothers felt on this issue.

I have a dream of being somebody someday, maybe a teacher. But they [the welfare agency] don't see it that way. They treat me like a bum.

Lydia, Philadelphia

Discussion

The experience of welfare imposes countless obstacles to the advancement of Puerto Rican clients. Some of these obstacles arise directly from this experience in the form of program rules and service delivery practices. Others are external to it but are triggered by the condition of being on welfare. Being Spanish-dominant is not just a barrier to employment. It can also be a cause for prejudice, discrimination, unresponsiveness, and mistreatment within welfare agencies.

Puerto Rican AFDC recipients often find themselves involved in court cases, for the

[22] In New York City a "Face to Face" is a procedure which, upon due notification, requires clients to come to the welfare agency for *ad hoc* assessments.

most part court action regarding allegations of child abuse or child neglect, which throw them into a maze of legal procedures and threats from which they often find no way out. As the examples of Angel and Casilda, Susana, and Laura show, these twists of fortune are often related to AFDC participation. In addition to the stigma of welfare, these clients must face civil and/or criminal charges which bring further economic and psychological pressures in their wake.

When confronted with these situations, Puerto Rican AFDC recipients have no choice but to rely on the assistance of often unsympathetic, arrogant, and indifferent public defenders, sometimes a different one for each court appearance. As one CBO Group participant put it: "Clients go through these processes not knowing the time of day, often relying decisively on the intervention of social workers from community-based organizations as translators and advocates."

According to CBO Group participants, these clients lack the basic wherewithal that legal action requires. In other words, they are ignorant of the fact that they have a right to a lawyer, due process, and the presumption of innocence. Moreover, their cases often hinge on proper hygiene and dress and these are also sometimes lacking. The staff of community-based organizations occasionally has to train AFDC clients to acquire presentation skills and basic hygiene.

Puerto Ricans bear these pressures from a precarious position, often being newly arrived from the Island, without family or friends, and unable to speak English. Raúl,[23] for example, is an epileptic who suffered a seizure at the airport shortly after arriving in New York. He does not speak English and was arrested and thrown in jail for three days before his condition was established. He has been on welfare since. During the past five years he has also been trying to get his mentally retarded child back from the foster home where he was placed shortly after the airport incident.

It is not certain that all Puerto Rican AFDC clients face the same kinds of obstacles and pressures. The CBO Group participants from Newark agreed that Puerto Rican AFDC recipients in that city were as needy as those from New York City, yet they did not think that Newark clients were as besieged by the kinds of problems exemplified by Raúl's, Susana's, or Laura's cases. The participants from Philadelphia felt that the welfare system in their city did not bear as oppressively on clients as did the New York City welfare system. In their view, the central feature of the experience of welfare in Philadelphia is that the resources available to promote self-sufficiency are being used instead to discourage clients and to keep them on welfare.

In the context of economic restructuring, slow economic growth, and low wages, the experience of welfare becomes, paradoxically, both the only feasible alternative to economic destitution and a formidable barrier to self-sufficiency for many Puerto Ricans on AFDC.

Implications

The experience of Puerto Ricans on welfare presents JOBS programs with a significant challenge.

States will have to structure collaborative arrangements that build on the strengths and potential of currently existing service delivery systems while avoiding the pitfalls of prevailing rules and practices. Inevitably, there will be variations between JOBS programmatic features and practice. Consis-

[23] Raúl is one of the two males in the New York focus groups. His story was reported in the CBO Group session.

tency is not the challenge; the real difficulty is preventing the best features of JOBS programs from being ineffective if implemented through a system that is insensitive and dehumanizing.

Focus group participants are not convinced that their advancement will be fostered by the same institutions that impede their progress. Therefore, it will be difficult to convince Puerto Ricans of the promise of JOBS.

Puerto Ricans can be convinced of the promise of JOBS if evidence showing the feasibility of self-sufficiency is presented to them. But skepticism will prevail to the extent that welfare agency workers continue to ignore them because they can't speak English, or if their families are separated or destroyed when they speak candidly about their problems. They will not be convinced if the shift from income-maintenance to self-sufficiency is not matched by an emphasis on agency mission rather than agency accountability on the part of the institutions responsible for the implementation of JOBS programs.

Whether participation is voluntary or not, JOBS programs should adopt marketing strategies and risk-free assessments in order to attract motivated, enthusiastic, and trustful Puerto Rican clients.

This should not be understood as a defense of the practice that has come to be known as "creaming."[24] AFDC clients need to be motivated to participate in JOBS programs in ways that will make them feel that it is their decision, that it is in their interest to be a part of the program, and that their needs, not the program's administrative requirements, come first. A marketing approach to participation is an important part of the Massachusetts Employment and Training (ET) Program. Says Demetra Smith Nightingale of the Urban Institute: "ET includes an intensive marketing effort. ET has been compared to a business trying to satisfy its customers."[25] So far this approach has proven useful to the success of the ET program.

The notion of "risk-free" assessments might seem out of place when assessment is defined as a process of "employability planning and accountability".[26] But in the process of identifying the needs of an individual, of her children, and of other family members, information might surface that could be used to compound the predicament of the individual and/or her family.

Evelyn Ganzglass of the National Governors' Association is right when she argues that, ultimately, assessment is not a technical issue.[27] But the issue is not just that politics will have an impact on the chosen assessment strategies, but also that clients must trust that their candor will not be rewarded by the destruction of their families. Obviously, there is no evidence in this regard that relates to FSA implementation, but there is much in the pre-FSA practice of welfare and other human service agencies that could taint JOBS programs given the need for collaborative arrangements.[28]

There is a clear role for community-based organizations (CBOs) in the implementation process.

[24] "Creaming" is associated with Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs and is the practice of serving the most job-ready individuals from the pool of people able to participate.

[25] Demetra Smith Nightingale, *et.al., Evaluation of the Massachusetts Employment and Training (ET) Program* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1991), p. 3.

[26] Evelyn Ganzglass, *Quality Assessment in the JOBS Program* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association, 1991), p. vii.

[27] Ganzglass, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

[28] For a summary review of activities at New York City's Child Welfare Administration which illustrate this point, see "The Knock on the Door at Midnight," *New York Post* editorial, February 6, 1991, p. 24.

This is particularly true given the ancillary role CBOs play in the service-delivery process, especially with Spanish-dominant Puerto Ricans. In New York City, CBO staff act as translators and advocates for Puerto Rican and Latino AFDC recipients; in Newark the city contracts with CBOs to provide educational services; in Philadelphia CBOs run ESOL and GED programs.

There is much that welfare agencies could do to gain the trust of Puerto Rican clients. On the other hand, Puerto Ricans **already** trust the neighborhood agencies where they receive services. Were it not for these organizations, the experience of welfare would be worse than a nightmare for Puerto Rican clients.

The role of CBOs in the implementation process can be economic (by providing education and training to prepare clients for the job market) or noneconomic (by providing services that will keep families stable and functional), but regardless of the specific role, their inclusion is essential. Without the intervention of such groups the goals of the Family Support Act are less likely to be fulfilled.

VI. Barriers to Self-Sufficiency

Findings

Some focus group participants have adequate skills and work experience; they are unable to work given their family responsibilities or because they lack adequate English proficiency.

The following are relevant illustrations:

We deal with clients [AFDC mothers] that want to work but are illiterate. For others the problem is not knowing English. But we also have people with work experience. One of the focus group participants had her own business; another was a beautician and another a nurse in Puerto Rico.

CBO Group

I used to work in pediatrics and the maternity ward at a hospital in Puerto Rico. I'm not working now because of the kids. When I got pregnant I stopped looking for a job.

Sonia, New York City

Jorge is an X-Ray technician but he can't find a job because of his English.

CBO Group

Parents are not willing to leave their children in the care of strangers and are fearful of the possibility of child abuse.

The concerns of focus group participants centered on the security and well-being of their children. They were also concerned about the competency of child-care providers.

I don't like child care, I'm petrified about child care. I saw a teacher once holding a boy so a girl could hit him. The teacher said, "That boy likes to hit a lot so the girl should hit him back," and she held him. You don't do that.

Sonia, New York City

I got child care from the [welfare] agency but the baby sitter would come in late and then I was late for my training. Then she refused to take care of my younger son because she said he was too difficult. I sent my kids to a day-care center and then a teacher started hitting them. I complained and they told me that she was a nervous person. Well, if she's nervous she shouldn't be taking care of kids.

Clara, New York City

I left my kids once with someone and left the food I wanted them to eat. When I came back they were hungry because they only had juice.

Julia, Newark

I won't go anywhere where I can't take my children. I don't trust anybody enough to leave my kids with them.

Leonor, Philadelphia

Transportation problems can make provisions for education, training, and child care meaningless in practice.

Transportation problems are intertwined with child-care issues. Research has found that easy access is a determinant of child-care choices.[29] This is true for focus group participants. Lack of easy access to child care is thus a barrier to self-sufficiency insofar as it discourages Puerto Rican AFDC single heads of households from preparing themselves to enter the labor market. The cost of transportation and the logistics of moving about with children are also important concerns.

If they [the welfare agency] are going to give me child care it has to be in the neighborhood. If I have to go out of my way it is worthless.

Matilde, New York City

A small income is not going to cover my transportation expenses. Going in the subway with a stroller at rush hour is a nightmare.

Enid, New York City

According to participants, the cost of housing is an important barrier to self-sufficiency.

This is true for all focus group participants although there are variations between cities. One participant, for example, had moved to Newark from New York City in search of lower housing costs. In Newark, however, housing costs were still considered a significant barrier to self-sufficiency. Moreover, given the lower level of AFDC benefits in Newark *vis-à-vis* New York City, her overall economic situation had not improved significantly with the change of residency. The statements below were given in response to the following questions, respectively: "What do you need to become self-sufficient?" and "What prevents you from making economic progress?"

[All I need] is a good job and a lower rent.

Julia, Newark

Rents are too high...if you receive $424 and your rent is $400, what's left? [Just] $24 to buy clothes for your children? That's nothing.

Adela, Newark

Those who feel they can work fear that once out of welfare they will not be able to sustain their families.

This fear is in line with growing concerns that the Family Support Act might simply turn the welfare poor into the working poor. This fear is an effective barrier to self-sufficiency insofar as it reinforces feelings of hopelessness and skepticism among AFDC recipients.

I wouldn't mind being out of welfare. I can work, but the kids, I have three, it would be difficult to work and sustain three kids. All my money would go to pay the doctor.

Estela, Philadelphia

[29] Maria Stupp Rothschild, *Public School Center vs. Family Home Day Care: Single Parents' Reasons for Selection*, ERIC ED 162759, 1978

They've [caseworkers at the welfare agency] been telling us recently that we have to take classes or else and that is like a threat. But they don't stop to think that if they take our medical cards the children are going to suffer.

Ruth, Philadelphia

[My main worry is] getting off welfare and not having enough to support [my] kid, 'cause once I'm out of it I don't want to regret it because when you're out it's hard to go back in.

Marta, New York City

While Puerto Rican AFDC mothers appear to have positive attitudes toward work,[30] for focus group participants welfare appeared as a better alternative. In these cases there was also an awareness that the choice was not the best.

This is an important barrier since in terms of dollars and cents it is sometimes better to be on welfare than to work. For some critics of welfare this is evidence that choosing welfare is a rational decision and that AFDC recipients actually prefer welfare to work. Enough has been said elsewhere to show the fallacy of this argument.[31] The evidence from the focus groups shows that the economic edge welfare sometimes has over work becomes apparent once individuals are within the system.

When you work for your welfare benefits you get less [money], and when you stay at home you get more, so it's better to stay at home and forget about training and getting a job. But it should be the other way around.

Marta, New York City

When I was in New Jersey I found a job and all they gave me [the welfare agency] was $20 for five people at home, so I said forget it, I'm not going to work.

Angie, Philadelphia

Discussion

The Family Support Act is correct in its assumption that key human capital deficiencies, such as those highlighted by this research, constitute formidable obstacles to self-sufficiency. Yet the focus group discussions suggest that to overcome these barriers it is not enough to mandate educational and employment training services, child-care support, and transitional services; there also are objective, institutional, and subjective barriers which will be difficult to overcome.

A common concern among focus group participants is that FSA provisions will mean little if the conditions in which these services are provided are not conducive to the goal they purport to promote. They feel that services must be accessible. For example, whenever possible, employment training should be neighborhood-based and it should lead to neighborhood-based employment. This is important not only because it eliminates transportation problems, but also because some participants will need to know that they can succeed in a familiar environment before they can venture outside those boundaries. Island-born mothers, for example, face significant obstacles and pressures in dealing with the discontinuities of language, values, and networks of family and friends that occur in the transition to inner-city environments. Thus, in their case, it

[30] The value of work in the eyes of Puerto Rican mothers appears to be high. DSS data shows 70 percent of Puerto Rican AFDC case heads agreeing with the statement: "Working moms are more useful to their families than those without jobs," compared to 59 percent of their black counterparts.

[31] See, for example, Ellwood, *op.cit.*, pp. 59, 61; Schorr, *Within Our Reach...*, p. xxv; and Wilson, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-95.

might be more profitable to provide services that are based on the maximum utilization of neighborhood-based institutions and resources.

Easy access to services and, ultimately, to the workplace, is an important issue, especially for Island-born AFDC mothers. It is safe to assume that these mothers experience important discontinuities in the transition to inner-city environments which add stress to their families. Even though Puerto Rico is considered a modern society by many, important discontinuities of language, networks of family and friends, and values exist between the Island setting, both rural and urban, and the mainland inner cities in which Puerto Ricans concentrate. In these new contexts, housing and transportation problems, for example, become more complex and difficult to handle.

The skepticism of focus group participants mentioned above is a subjective barrier to self-sufficiency. A significant number feel that their problems are not understood, that the service delivery establishment does not care about them, that they are treated like parasites, and that the attitude the system demands from them is one of conformity with their situation. In their dealings with welfare agencies, these mothers have had to wrestle with bureaucratic inflexibilities and inefficiencies which often have crushed their motivation and impeded their progress.

Focus group participants are also not convinced that the current labor market can offer them jobs that will lift them out of poverty. For example, the fear of some participants of losing Medicaid benefits will not be easily quelled with references to provisions for transitional services so long as they remain convinced that all a job will do is turn them from welfare poor into working poor. Further, participants see the goal of self-sufficiency as arbitrarily imposed from above and are reluctant to work if the mandate is to accept any kind of work. They might not be entirely correct in their assessment but feel, nonetheless, that in such circumstances their families, especially their children, are the ones who are going to pay. Some feel that if they are going to be self-sufficient they ought to have a say in the matter and ultimately decide how to become independent themselves.

Some participants understand that welfare is not the path to economic progress, but beyond that they feel they cannot depend on any type of government intervention to improve their situation significantly. For a number of them the only conceivable way of making progress is to wait until they no longer have to provide for their children.

Implications

The interrelatedness of barriers faced by Puerto Rican AFDC recipients requires holistic strategies that will move them toward self-sufficiency.

All focus group participants, including those who were defensive about being on welfare, wish to be self-sufficient someday. When asked what they needed to do so, they invariably responded that training programs where they could acquire marketable skills, English proficiency, adequate child care, and a good job would help them achieve this goal.

Educational, training, and child-care services will have to be connected to community economic development.

In Puerto Rican neighborhoods, community economic development means small business development. The role of these businesses in minority communities is absolutely crucial. Training and job creation costs

are less in small businesses than in large enterprises. In neighborhoods whose residents face high unemployment rates and lack formal education, small businesses are often the only source of jobs. In fact, 63 percent of the labor force get their first job in a small business.[32] This is even more significant in the case of Island-born AFDC mothers given the discontinuities in the transition to inner cities mentioned above; they will need to be serviced in small-scale, familiar environments, and will need to work in low-pressure jobs that allow them to hone their skills and develop their work habits.

VII. Attitudes Toward Welfare and Work

Findings

Most of the focus group participants want to work or study. They are highly motivated and optimistic.

This might appear to be in contradiction with statements made by focus group participants that show skepticism of the Family Support Act and despair about their situation. But the fact is that not all of the participants feel dubious about the prospects for change. They would like to change their lives and feel confident that they could do so under the right circumstances. They recognize their predicament and know what they need to do to improve their situation.

I want to study, get my diploma, and then get the best job available.
Lydia, Philadelphia

When I got pregnant I stopped looking for work but now I'm becoming interested in getting a job because I have three girls and I feel bored and I feel that I'm losing my pride. When you work you feel more sure of yourself.
Sonia, New York City

I'm willing to take any job as long as it pays well and I can do it.
Maribel, Newark

If my kids were in school all day I would go to school.
Claudia, Newark

Some participants recognize that AFDC enrollment tends to have a negative impact on their attitudes toward work and work-related habits. But they invariably expressed their dissatisfaction with a structure of incentives that is not right.

Welfare punishes work but it may not necessarily affect work or work-related behavior. The evidence from the focus groups confirms the notion that many poor people have desirable work-related habits, such as saving money, and that for most individuals work is preferable to welfare.

You save $800 or a $1,000 for an emergency and you get scared, so you spend the money afraid that if you save it welfare will take it away from you. They [the welfare agency] should say: 'She's not throwing her money away, she's doing the right thing,' but no, instead they pressure you to keep you down.
Sonia, New York City

They give me like $230 in coupons [food stamps] and extra money that they give you. [So you figure] 'I'm not gonna work, I've got it made.' But I've been there and I grew up with that. I'm so tired of it that I don't care [if] they

[32] Lois Athey, *Community Economic Development in Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (Washington, D.C.: National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., 1991), p. 32.

give me $300, I just want to get out of it.

Marta, New York City

Non-Puerto Rican Latino AFDC focus group participants disliked welfare and regret their dependency on public assistance as much and for similar reasons as did Puerto Ricans.

This finding also cuts in the opposite direction: Latino recipients felt defensive about welfare for similar reasons as did Puerto Ricans. The important point is that the defensiveness is not capricious: Latino AFDC recipients have good reason to be concerned about their well-being if and when public assistance runs out for them. The relevant point for human service administrators is that their policy decisions must be driven by the assumption that most AFDC recipients dislike welfare and prefer to work.

[Going on welfare] was sad for us because [when you are on welfare] people think you're lazy.

Angela, Colombian AFDC mother, New York City

I was referred to the welfare agency by a relative but it is sad and humiliating to be on welfare

Sandra, Dominican AFDC mother, New York City

Discussion

In the groups observed by José Cruz, motivation and optimism were not always attributes of the youngest or the better skilled. For example, Matilde, a single mother from New York City who is under 24 years of age and bilingual, was quite reluctant to accept the idea of mandatory welfare-to-work programs. This was in contrast with Teresa, a mature but illiterate mother also from New York, who showed a keen desire to learn how to read and write in order to find a job and get off welfare. In Newark, both young and mature participants seemed quite enthusiastic and optimistic about their future but not warm to the idea of adding the burden of work to the responsibilities of single parenthood. A significant number of participants from Philadelphia were in training and most of them are young, but this is more an example of sample bias than a tested age differential.

In New York City there were as many optimists as pessimists among those living in public housing as among those living in private homes. For example, Clara, a young mother of four from the Bronx, told the focus group how once she and her kids had had to jump over a dead body in the hall of their building in order to get to their door. She didn't need to live "in the projects" to want to get off welfare, she said. Norma, who lives in public housing, indirectly expressed her unwillingness to work by complaining that if she got a job her rent would triple. But Yamila, who also lives in public housing, was beaming with pride during the session because her short sojourn through welfare was about to end. Her rent would go up but she didn't mind: her family was getting off welfare.

All of those who were defensive had good reasons to be on welfare. They need help but felt that if forced off welfare, they would find alternative ways of supporting themselves and their families. Their concern with such a prospect, however, was vivid.

The participants' attitudes toward welfare suggest a complex pattern of interactions in which clients respond according to context and conflicting values. Participants who would nod in apparent agreement with sharp

criticisms of the service delivery system offered by others in the focus groups, or with complaints about the disincentives to work fostered by welfare, would then affirm that they personally had no problem with the system.

But they all in some way expressed their dislike of welfare. Some complained that welfare undermined the work ethic; others ranted about the bureaucratic constraints welfare imposed on them; some were simply weary of arrogant and abusive caseworkers. According to participants in the CBO Group, there are also those who hate welfare only when confronted with the stigma it brings to them. These individuals often resent public assistance while simultaneously feeling entitled to it.

Implications

Human service administrators in cities with significant Puerto Rican AFDC populations will have to develop JOBS programs that are creative and flexible enough to serve individuals with different needs.

As has been suggested above, not all Puerto Rican AFDC mothers will require the same kinds of services nor will they all be at the same level of need. There is plenty in their life situations to make them not want to work, yet there is a substratum of optimism and willingness to change that runs through even the most reluctant.

In some cases, those who are optimistic and motivated will require more rather than less help simply because the odds against them are higher. Clara, from New York City, is the best example of this. She volunteered for English instruction and job training against the advice of her caseworker. When the focus group met she had been studying for eight months and, as noted below, was feeling self-confident and hopeful about her prospects. As of this writing, however, Clara had discontinued her training. According to her social worker, marital difficulties, which were compounded by the arrest of her husband on drug-dealing charges, had thrown Clara into a severe depression. The social worker told José Cruz, "I don't know how [Clara] copes. Everytime I go visit her at home I get so depressed. The place where she lives is just terrible. Her husband's arrest has upset the kids incredibly."

VIII. CBO Focus Group

Findings

Most of the data obtained from the CBO focus group has been used to illustrate the findings presented above; therefore, the information is incorporated into the previous sections of this report. Only two findings are reported here. The first relates to the experience of Puerto Rican human service professionals; the second was discussed in the CBO Group session.

Puerto Rican social workers are often treated by Anglos within the social services establishment with the same level of disdain experienced by some of their clients.

According to Raquel, a social worker from one of the New York City CBOs, Puerto Rican social workers are paid no deference, are treated arrogantly, and their credentials are routinely and rudely questioned. "I have an MSW from Columbia University," she said, "and I have encountered pharmacists running foster-care agencies whose credentials are never questioned. But I always have to show proof that I'm licensed."

Focus group participants showed behavior that suggests deficits that could slow down the transition to sulf-sufficiency.

As noted above, José Cruz observed two focus group sessions, in New York City and Newark, to determine if the focus group process was a source of insight in regard to attitudes toward welfare and work. The focus group participants observed were undisciplined and informal in their behavior; many were late to the sessions. Once the discussions began, there was frequent movement in and out of the room. Although the facilitators showed remarkable skill at keeping the discussions on track, the participants went into tangent topics at the slightest opportunity.

Discussion

Isabel, also a social worker from New York City, supported Raquel's claim of prejudice against Puerto Rican professionals. The claim should not come as a surprise. In a recent survey, 74 percent of non-Hispanics said that Hispanics prefer welfare to work, 56 percent considered them more lazy than whites, 50 percent thought them more prone to violence, 55 percent thought them less intelligent, and 61 percent considered them less patriotic.[33] The survey, which was conducted by Tom W. Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, shows that prejudice based on stereotypes dies hard or not at all.[34]

Both Raquel and Isabel, however, argued that prejudice against Puerto Rican professionals goes beyond ethnic stereotyping. "These attitudes involve competing advocacy strategies," said Raquel. She claimed that Puerto Rican social workers are less willing than their Anglo counterparts to compromise the interests of their clients. When they appear before Family Court, for example, they are ready to stand up for these clients and this creates friction with the social workers representing city agencies. Because many of them are more willing to fight for what they feel is right, Puerto Rican social workers are considered disagreeable by agency arbitrators and judges. Consequently, their claims and actions are held under closer scrutiny, they are often subject to humiliation, and their professional life is generally made more difficult.

As to the focus group process, two interpretations of the observations noted above were advanced by the CBO Group participants. Some suggested that the lateness and informality were due to the focus group participants' familiarity with the host agency. Not all the participants knew each other but they all knew the agency and the focus group facilitators. Thus, the argument went, the meeting was like a family reunion and the laxity was just contextual.

The second interpretation offered an amendment to the first. While in agreement with the "context" thesis, some participants added that these traits--informality, laxity--are culturally determined and they can be observed even in second-generation Puerto Ricans. It was proposed by them that, although born in the United States, some Puerto Ricans maintain attitudes that are typical of rural economies and traditional societies because the *barrios* in which they grow up are extensions of the Island.

This is a plausible but unproven interpretation. The relation between the Island and mainland communities is too complex and

[33] See, Lynne Duke, "Whites' Racial Stereotypes Persist," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 1991, p. A1.
[34] See Tom W. Smith, *Ethnic Images*, GSS Topical Report No. 19 (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, December 1990), especially p. 9.

variegated to say that one is simply an extension of the other. While the lateness and informality was observed in both Island- and mainland-born focus group participants, the "undisciplined" ones were mostly Island-born. Also, there is much in the experience of other groups to suggest that laxity and informality are not idiosyncratic behaviors. And further, even if these patterns of conduct are related to nativity or cultural predispositions, there is no reason why they could not be overcome given the right motivation, circumstances, and incentives.

Implications

It is logical to assume that few Puerto Rican AFDC mothers will expect fair treatment from a system that treats even Puerto Rican professionals rather badly.

As Lawrence Bobo of the University of California at Los Angeles has said, a set of ideas that putatively explain why certain groups deserve their inferior status is usually based on kernels of truth.[35] The problem with these facts is precisely that they are partial and, therefore, misrepresent the totality of characteristics, status, beliefs, and values of the stereotyped group.

Although the cultural interpretation of the focus group process offered by the CBO Group participants can be contested, it is in keeping with the earlier statement that the road to self-sufficiency is not paved with just education, employment training, child care, and transitional services.

Research on the determinants of employment among Hispanics has generally failed to produce consistent findings.[36] Yet it is reasonable to hypothesize that cultural factors can have an impact on the labor force participation of Puerto Rican single heads of households who are AFDC recipients. On the one hand, it is possible that cultural factors compound the discontinuities that occur in the transition of Puerto Rican single heads of households to inner-city environments. This combination of influences could make these women think that they are incapable of anything better than welfare. If, on the other hand, Puerto Rican *barrios* are permeated by cultural influences from the Island, similar ways of thinking could form in second-generation, mainland-born Puerto Rican single heads of households on welfare which could produce similar feelings of helplessness and low expectations.

For FSA implementation, the relevant issue is whether attitudes exert a centripetal force (by keeping Puerto Rican AFDC recipients on welfare) or centrifugal force (by getting them into the labor market) in the transition to self-sufficiency. If their role is centripetal, it will be important to establish the extent to which culture plays a role in the formation of these attitudes. In this case, the question to be answered is, how can these attitudes be changed to help Puerto Rican AFDC recipients enter the labor market?

In any event, the issue of behavioral deficits should not be read as willful misconduct, and with that in mind, services offered to Puerto Rican AFDC mothers must help them acquire the

[35] See Lynne Duke, *op. cit.*

[36] See Susan Welch, Albert K. Karnig, and Richard Eribes, "Changes in Hispanic Local Public Employment in the Southwest," in F. Chris García, editor, *Latinos and the Political System* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 412-413; Edwin Meléndez and Clara Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans in the Northeast and the Changing Economy, Report to Funders* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT, July 1988), pp. 10-12.

discipline and sense of structure that a successful entrance into the world of work requires.

It could be argued that they will acquire these skills through the education and training process itself, but this might be true for some but not for all AFDC mothers. Thus, the issue must be addressed discretely and directly. By doing so human service administrators will ease the transition from the laboratory-like environment of JOBS programs into the real world of work and make the success of these programs more likely.

IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

In his book, *Poor Support, Poverty in the American Family,* David Ellwood contends that the fundamental conflicts of the welfare system cannot be solved by reform. In dealing with poverty, he writes, "The objective should be to replace welfare with something that takes much better account of the problems faced by the poor--a system that ensures that everyone who exercises reasonable responsibility can make it without welfare."[37]

NPRC's research suggests that Puerto Rican AFDC recipients share in this assessment; they want an alternative to welfare that takes better account of the problems they face. Most of the Puerto Rican AFDC mothers interviewed want to get off welfare but are skeptical about the promise of the Family Support Act. They believe that those who are unable to work because of illness or disability should not have to feel stigmatized and worry that they might be left to fend for themselves. And further, that those with human capital deficiencies or affected by temporary setbacks should receive sufficient support to tune back into the labor market--into jobs that enable them to provide for their families.

It is safe to assume that Puerto Rican AFDC mothers can acquire the skills they need to find jobs and that they can manage the stress on their families. Says Clara, "I've been studying for eight months now. At first I couldn't concentrate, I was restless being away from my kids. When I began studying I couldn't do anything but think about my kids and my husband. I thought I was not going to make it. Besides, I don't know English and I'm learning it. But I've gotten used to the routine and now I trust the person that takes care of the children."

It is also reasonable to expect to find some individuals who wish to move ahead but are not so sure that they can make it or that it is worth trying. Julia, from New York City, said, "I'd like to be better off but I don't speak English, and that sets me back because I can't go to school. But if I go to work I would not pay $137 for rent anymore. All I could make is $3.50 an hour and after taxes, what's left? As soon as the landlord learns that I'm working he'll make me pay $200 or $300."

Those who doubt the promise of the Family Support Act will not be easily convinced of its feasibility. It will be equally difficult to convince them that the goal of self-sufficiency is not just another rationale for retrenchment in fiscal policy.

The skeptics among Puerto Rican AFDC mothers are not alone. A study by Child Trends, Inc., concluded recently that the challenge of self-sufficiency for women in the bottom half of the welfare distribution, that is, those with extremely low skill levels, little employment experience, and low expecta-

[37] David T. Ellwood, *Poor Support, Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 11.

tions, is daunting.[38] Furthermore, their findings add legitimacy to the concern that FSA implementation might only succeed in turning the welfare poor into the working poor.[39] JOBS observers nationwide have added to this by pointing out the many difficulties implementation faces.[40] Finally, as noted in Section VII, positive attitudes often rest on shaky foundations and can be easily thwarted.

There is no quick answer to the question of how to ultimately promote the transition to self-sufficiency. For example, discrete studies of the determinants of Hispanic youth employment *vis-à-vis* black and white youth have established that for all groups previous employment is the best predictor of current employment. For female youth, having family responsibilities tends to be associated with not being employed and being in an area of strong employment growth is related to being employed.[41]

These findings suggest that employment will be less likely for Puerto Rican AFDC mothers with little or no employment history, that as long as they have to take care of their children they will prefer not to work, and that employment training programs will not fare well in the context of economic restructuring and population decline in the Northeast, where Puerto Ricans concentrate.

Conversely, observing the following general guidelines will make the transition to self-sufficiency more likely for them:

- The emphasis of collaborative arrangements between JOBS programs and human service agencies must be on the strengths and potential of currently existing service delivery systems. The challenge for human service administrators is to prevent the best features of JOBS programs from being ineffective if implemented through a system that is insensitive and dehumanizing.

- The promise of economic progress, if adequately presented, can make even the most reluctant AFDC mother agree to invest time and energy toward self-sufficiency. JOBS programs must have a strong marketing emphasis which, to be appealing to Puerto Ricans, must be bilingual and culturally sensitive.

- Puerto Rican AFDC mothers must be subject to intensive, risk-free assessments. Their needs must be fully identified and properly addressed; their trust must be rewarded with help rather than punitive measures.

- These assessments must take into account the values underlying specific preferences. Puerto Rican single heads of families who fall within federally targeted groups but who prefer to stay at home to care for their children should not be mandated to participate in JOBS programs. This decision should be voluntary. Nonvolunteers should be offered instead family support that focuses on the needs of their children.

- Puerto Rican single heads of families who are willing to accept child care must be offered family- or neighborhood-based services. While the welfare of children must remain the paramount concern of child-care arrangements, the psychological well-being of their mothers must also be taken into account.

[38] Nicholas Zill, *et.al.*, *Welfare Mothers as Potential Employees: A Statistical Profile Based on National Survey Data* (Washington, D.C.: Child Trends, Inc.), p. 47.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[40] See American Public Welfare Association, *Early State Experiences and Policy Issues in the Implementation of the JOBS Program: Briefing Paper for Human Service Administrators*, written by Rick Ferreira (Washington, D.C.: American Public Welfare Association, 1990).
[41] Meléndez and Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

- Counseling and psychological support will be essential for most participants in JOBS programs. This kind of service is important for AFDC mothers born in Puerto Rico and will also be extremely helpful to those whose efforts toward self-sufficiency are threatened by rather unfavorable odds.

- Educational services and employment training must focus on English instruction and basic skills. These efforts must be tied to job growth strategies, particularly through community economic development.

- The participation of Puerto Rican or Latino community-based organizations in the implementation process will increase the likelihood of self-suffiency. CBOs have a useful role to play in marketing, assessment, service provision, and community economic development.

There is no one single factor that accounts for the large number of Puerto Rican women on welfare and no single strategy will enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty and dependency. Research knowledge on the causes of welfare dependency among Puerto Rican women is tentative, but when it comes to remedies even less is known about what works best and what is cost-effective. The experience of welfare, however, has shown focus group participants what kinds of services are necessary. Their criticism of the inadequacies of welfare agencies confirms the wealth of evidence which shows that comprehensive, intensive, targeted services can make a difference in the lives of families. Their experience with sensitive welfare caseworkers and CBO staff has shown them that to make social programs work, services must be provided by professionals with the time and skill to establish relations based on mutual respect and trust.[42]

To provide effective services through effective providers: in the current economic and budgetary climate, that is the real challenge of JOBS programs and the Family Support Act.

[42] For general illustrations and evidence of what makes programs and service delivery effective see Schorr, *op. cit.*, and Kathryn H. Porter, *Making JOBS Work* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1990).

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Appendix 1

Overview of the Family Support Act of 1988

The Family Support Act was signed into law as P.L. 100-485 on October 13, 1988. The stated purpose of the law is to revise the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to emphasize work, child support, and family benefits by encouraging and assisting families to obtain the education, training, and employment needed to avoid long-term welfare dependence.

Program Components

Child Support

To ensure that child support is paid by absent parents, the law requires that courts use numerical formulas to set support amounts and mandates income withholding to collect support payments. Paternity establishment programs are also mandated by the law. States are encouraged to adopt civil procedures for voluntary acknowledging of paternity and procedures for establishing paternity in contested cases for which the law allows for genetic tests to establish the identity of the parent.

Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Program

Under FSA most AFDC recipients are required to participate in a JOBS program. Services and activities that states must make available include high school or equivalent education (combined with training, if necessary), basic and remedial education, education for individuals with limited English proficiency, jobs skills training, job readiness activities to help prepare participants for work, and job development and job placement. States are required to have an approved JOBS plan by October 1, 1990, but the deadline for statewide program availability is October 1, 1992.

Supportive Services

- **Child Care:** Each state must guarantee child care for each family with a dependent child if such care is necessary for an individual in the family to accept employment or remain employed. Individuals participating in an education and training activity are also eligible for child care. The law authorizes states to offer this service either directly, through providers, by facilitating cash or vouchers, or by reimbursing the caretaker relative in the family. States are free to adopt other arrangements, but in all cases guidelines to ensure basic health and safety must be in place.
- **Transitional Services**: FSA provides for extended eligibility for child care and medical assistance for cases in which a family no longer receives AFDC benefits as a result of employment. Former recipients will be entitled to up to one year of child care after meeting certain requirements. Generally, continued medical assistance will be offered for six months free of charge. After that, states may impose a premium for an additional six months of coverage.
- **Benefits for Two-Parent Families**: Mandatory coverage is also provided for unemployed two-parent families for at least six months in each year.
- **Benefits for Minor Parents**: In the case of an unmarried individual who is under age 18 and who has a dependent child, the law provides for support if the individual and child reside with his/her parents, legal guardian, foster home, maternity home, or other adult-supervised living arrangement.

Participation

Although states can determine whom to serve first, federal funding is tied to specific participation requirements. To be fully

funded, states must spend at least 55 percent of JOBS funds on four target groups:

- parents under age 24 who have not completed and are not enrolled in high school or its equivalent,
- parents under age 24 who have little or no work experience,
- individuals who have received public assistance for at least 36 of the last 60 months, and
- members of a family who will lose AFDC eligibility within two years because the youngest child will no longer qualify as a dependent child.

Within these groups, those who volunteer must be served first.

Implementation

Although different opinions exist, it is generally agreed that the JOBS program is the centerpiece of the Family Support Act. In this light, the difficulties noted by observers of the JOBS implementation process across the country acquire added significance. Of these difficulties, three appear to be the most important.

First, severe education deficits have been found among those being served. These deficits require intensive and more expensive education and skills training.

Second, federal budgetary constraints are becoming increasingly significant amid burgeoning pressures on recession-driven state budgets. The consequent addition of costs to states will not help their ability to match federal funds earmarked for JOBS programs.

Last, few states seem to have met the administrative requirements that complex data reporting and participation requirements demand.

In the cities covered in this report the highlights of FSA implementation as of December 1990 are as follows:

- In January of 1990, the implementation of New York City's version of JOBS, known as BEGIN (Begin Employment Gain Independence Now), was pending upon submission of a state plan by the legislature. The state finally approved its JOBS plan in July 1990 and by then the original BEGIN plan had been changed by Mayor David Dinkins' administration. To the federally mandated provisions for employment training and child care, the current city plan has added service provisions for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs.

- New Jersey's efforts to reform the welfare system antedate the Family Support Act. This, however, has not given Essex County, of which Newark is a part, a leading edge on FSA implementation. On the contrary, because it is one of the largest local jurisdictions in the state it was one of the last divisions to formulate its version of JOBS. Although implementation of the REACH (Realizing Economic Achievement) program began in October 1989, the county is still trying to resolve major administrative and budgetary issues, as well as conflicts between county and state provisions.

- Like New Jersey, Pennsylvania developed a statewide welfare reform plan before the Family Support Act was enacted. New Directions was approved in April 1987 and brought into compliance with federal regulations in October 1989. Unlike New York City and Essex County, Philadelphia has no local version of the state plan, but through the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) program the state contracts with local agencies to provide employment training locally.

Appendix 2

Profiles of Participating Community-based Organizations

Centro Pedro Claver, Inc., 3565 North 7th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19140; (215) 227-7111; Roger Zepernick, Executive Director; Focus Group Project Coordinator: Roberto R. Santiago. Centro Pedro Claver provides assistance to neighborhood residents in areas such as housing, youth employment, social services, and education. Focus group participants were drawn from a pool of clients who are AFDC recipients.

Loisaida, Inc., 710 East 9th Street, New York, New York, 10009; (212) 353-0272; Ruth Rodríguez, Executive Director; Focus Group Project Coordinator: Leila Arjona. Loisaida promotes the revitalization of the Lower East Side for neighborhood residents through job development, training, counseling, and youth programs geared toward school retention and leadership development. Loisaida has an early intervention program for drop-out prevention known as Project GREAT (Graduation Requires Early Attention and Teamwork). The agency deals extensively with AFDC recipients and selected focus group participants from a pool of Project GREAT parents.

Puerto Rican Family Institute, Inc., 116 West 14th Street, New York, New York, 10011; (212) 924-6320; María Elena Gironé, Executive Director; Focus Group Project Coordinators: Sonia Acobe-Morales and Paquita Meléndez. The Puerto Rican Family Institute offers comprehensive services in the areas of placement prevention, mental health, residential treatment programs, education, and research. The Institute combines casework and psychiatric counseling to prevent individual dysfunction and promote family stability. It serves clients throughout New York City and Puerto Rico and has extensive access to AFDC families. Focus group participants were selected from a pool of clients in their New Arrivals Program.

St. Columba Neighborhood Club, Inc., 25 Pennsylvania Avenue, Newark, New Jersey 07114; (201) 624-4222; René Deida, Executive Director; Focus Group Project Coordinators: Bernice Vélez, Raúl Barriera, Ana Cortés. The St. Columba Neighborhood Club offers services, information, and referrals through parenting programs, support for single mothers, and community development projects. St. Columba has an ongoing program which offers education and training services to AFDC recipients. Focus group participants were selected from this program. Edward Domínguez was St. Columba's Executive Director during the 1990 sessions of the focus groups.

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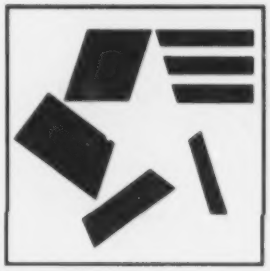

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